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The Need for Power and Influence, Sense of Power and Directiveness Among Teachers

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Abstract

The aim of the presented research was to answer the question whether people working as teachers differ from other professionals in terms of the sense of and need for power and directiveness. The study group consisted of 198 teachers, while the control group included 156 people from other occupations. The research procedure included: the SPS Sense of Power Scale (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012), the Index of Personal Reactions (Bennett, 1988), the SD Directiveness Scale (Ray, 1976) and an extended metric. Teachers had significantly higher results in terms of directiveness, sense of power in the family, sense of power towards colleagues, sense of power towards the supervisor, need for power and resistance to submission. Teachers had significantly lower results in the area of need for influence.

Keywords: *need for power, sense of power, directiveness, teachers, gender*

Introduction

The vast majority of people need a certain degree of power in their life. They want to make their own decisions, influence events, be able to make changes, or they simply do not want to be used, degraded, or mistreated. The extent to which people need power varies from person to person. This is due to, among other factors, character traits, personality, temperament, or conditions arising from the environment and personal experiences (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). The research

and analyses conducted by Joel Bennett (1988) have shown that people differ in their need and desire for power (need for power = nPower). Moreover, they also differ in their need for influence (nInfluence).

People are differentiated not only by the need for power, but also the sense of it in various relationships. A personal sense of power is defined as the perception of one's ability to influence another person or persons (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). It must be emphasized that in this case power is seen as the ability to influence others. John French and Bertram Raven (1959) linked power to potential energy and the influence on kinetic energy. It follows that people do not need to constantly give orders to be perceived as the ones possessing power, they only need to be able to influence their subordinates' behavior (Leavitt, 2005; Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). The personal sense of power may differ greatly depending on a given relationship. Research has shown that the personal sense of power among people in a relationship with a friend is significantly higher than in a relationship with the parents. Further analyses have shown that the personal sense of power of an individual is characterized by a certain degree of consistency between various relationships, but it is strongly and specifically conditioned for each interpersonal relationship (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012).

The personal sense of power, as shown by research, is very important. It influences the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of a person. It is not always compatible with the social position, status in the sight of others, possessed authority, or objective control over resources (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). Personality variables also play an important role in determining how "powerful" a certain person feels. Research subjects who held similar social positions, but differed in their personal sense of power have exhibited differences, i.e., due to their level of extraversion. People's beliefs concerning their power can shape their actual influence on others, regardless of their position in the social fabric. For instance, people who have a higher sense of power behave in a more effective manner, which increases their actual power (Bandura, 1999; Bugental & Lewis, 1999; Mowday, 1978).

Revealing one's high need for power or seeking to gain power often results in social condemnation. Certain cultural patterns and norms often cause people to deny that they have power or that they would like to have it. This is connected to the fact that many people perceive power in negative terms, as "zero-sum game" power, a situation requiring someone to be a winner and someone else a loser. Such perception of power is the cause of the belief that talking of power or of wanting to have it is rude, in bad taste, and should be avoided (Kipnis 1976; Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

However, people who exhibit a strong need for power can satisfy it in a socially acceptable manner. They can choose a profession characterized by a voluntary drive to help others and thus gain the ability to influence others. Analyses conducted by David Winter (1988, 1993) have shown that among teachers, clergy, and psychologists there are many individuals with a strong need for power. These people satisfy their needs by pursuing professions that are characterized by a high degree of autonomy and the possibility to influence others.

Research Purpose

The presented research has attempted to answer the question whether individual differences in the sense of and need for power and directiveness would differ among people by occupation, place of work, and work seniority. What may be particularly interesting are the differences between teachers and other professions or teachers working at different educational stages.

Research Methodology

Research Tools

The following tools were used in the research procedure:

- *SPS Sense of Power Scale* (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012) is a tool designed to study the personal sense of power. It consists of two parts. First, the person conducting the study chooses the area (relationship) of the research. For instance: *In my relationships with others...*; *In my relationship with my partner* (in a close relationship)... or other. After determining the relationship that the questionnaire will concern, the respondent answers eight questions concerning power (e.g., *I can make them listen to what I have to say*). The respondent gives answers on a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree). The higher the score, the greater the sense of power in a given relationship. The reliability of the scale is satisfactory (from $\alpha = 0.78$ to $\alpha = 0.87$).
- *IPR Index of Personal Reactions* (Bennett, 1988) is a tool created to study the need for power and influence. Factor analysis has confirmed the distinction between the need for power (nPower), understood as a selfish pursuit of position, and the need for influence (nInfluence), understood as a desire to persuade and influence others. The tool consists of 4 scales: the Ability

to Influence and Wield Power Scale (12 items), the Need for Power Scale (13 items), the Need for Influence Scale (8 items), and the Resistance to Subordination Scale (8 items). The respondent gives answers on a 5-point scale from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 5 (describes me very well). The reliability of the scale is satisfactory (from $\alpha = 0.75$ to $\alpha = 0.88$).

- *Directiveness Scale* (Ray, 1976) has been developed in the field of research on the authoritarian personality type. It is used to test for directiveness, understood as aggressive domination, a tendency to impose one's own will on others. A high score indicates a high level of directiveness. The reliability of the scale is satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.78$).
- *Extended metric* which includes questions concerning the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, their place of work and work seniority, working as a class teacher or holding leading positions.

Research Group

The research group consisted of 198 teachers (158 women and 40 men). The mean age of the respondents was 41.64 (SD = 9.26). The youngest person was 25 years old and the oldest was 66 years old. The teachers surveyed had worked in their profession from one to 43 years and the average work span was 16.96 years (SD = 10.00). 72% of the teachers worked as class teachers, having performed this function from 1 to 16 times. 10% of the respondents stated they held a leading position. There were 20 teachers who worked at leading positions in their workplace.

Due to the fact that the surveyed teachers worked simultaneously in several educational units, the research group was divided into eight subgroups: teachers working exclusively in primary schools, grades 1–3 ($n = 18$), grades 1–3 and 4–6 ($n = 14$), teachers working exclusively in grades 4–6 ($n = 39$), teachers working in primary and lower secondary schools ($n = 8$), teachers working exclusively in lower secondary schools ($n = 34$), teachers working in lower secondary and secondary schools ($n = 11$), teachers working exclusively in secondary schools ($n = 40$), and teachers working exclusively in higher education ($n = 26$). Eight teachers worked in other units. Due to the variety of the sizes of the research subgroups, the comparisons were performed with tests for numerically unequal subgroups and the assumptions concerning the homogeneity of variance were meticulously verified. Analyses for subgroups of similar size were also conducted, but they produced results analogous to the ones presented.

The control group included 156 people (114 women and 42 men). The mean age was 40.24 ($SD = 11.08$). The people in the control group were qualified from various professions, e.g.: librarian, economist, electronical engineer, electrician, physiotherapist, miner, salesman, computer scientist, engineer, clerk, waitress, accountant, doctor, manager, nurse, lawyer, entrepreneur, sales representative, psychologist, cleaner, sales clerk, etc. 20 people from the control group held a leading position in the workplace.

Results

Differences in the level of directiveness, sense of power, and need for power were observed. The teachers had significantly higher results in the areas of directiveness, sense of power in the family, sense of power towards work colleagues, sense of power towards the supervisor, sense of power and resistance to subordination. The teachers had significantly lower results in the area of need for influence. At the level of a statistical trend, the teachers had higher scores in the area of ability to wield power and influence (Table1).

Table 1. Directiveness, sense of and need for power in the teachers group and the control group – range of differences

Variables	Teachers group (n = 198)		Control group (n = 156)		U	Z	p
	M	SD	M	SD			
Directiveness	31.21	7.24	29.46	7.93	13235.5	-2.310	0.021
Sense of power in the family	42.53	5.94	38.08	6.94	9706.5	-6.002	<0.001
Sense of power towards colleagues	39.46	6.78	37.42	6.61	12382	-3.203	0.001
Sense of power towards supervisor	36.42	7.76	34.23	6.40	11879.5	-3.728	<0.001
Sense of ability to wield power and influence	38.47	9.94	36.35	10.84	13600	-1.929	0.054
Need for power	25.76	8.55	23.68	8.72	13108.5	-2.443	0.015
Need for influence	25.20	6.63	27.93	10.49	13433.5	2.103	0.035
Resistance to subordination	23.11	5.04	21.99	8.61	12619.5	-2.954	0.003

Of all the studied variables concerning the issue of power, the teachers' work experience was statistically significantly correlated with the need for power and

the need for influence. The correlation was inversely proportional. The teachers with a shorter work experience had a stronger need for power and a stronger need for influence. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Pearson's *r* correlation between variables concerning power and work experience of teachers

Variables	Teachers group (n = 198)	
	r	p
Directiveness	0.004	0.953
Sense of power in the family	-0.03	0.717
Sense of power towards students	-0.01	0.847
Sense of power towards colleagues	-0.01	0.872
Sense of power towards supervisor	0.10	0.171
Sense of ability to wield power and influence	-0.005	0.934
Need for power	-0.18	0.011
Need for influence	-0.17	0.016
Resistance to subordination	-0.07	0.297

The correlations between the variables concerning power and age differed between the teachers group and the control group. Negative correlations between age and directiveness, sense of power in the family, need for power and influence in the control group were observed. Among the teachers, negative correlations were observed only between the need for power and the need for influence. The results are presented in Table 3.

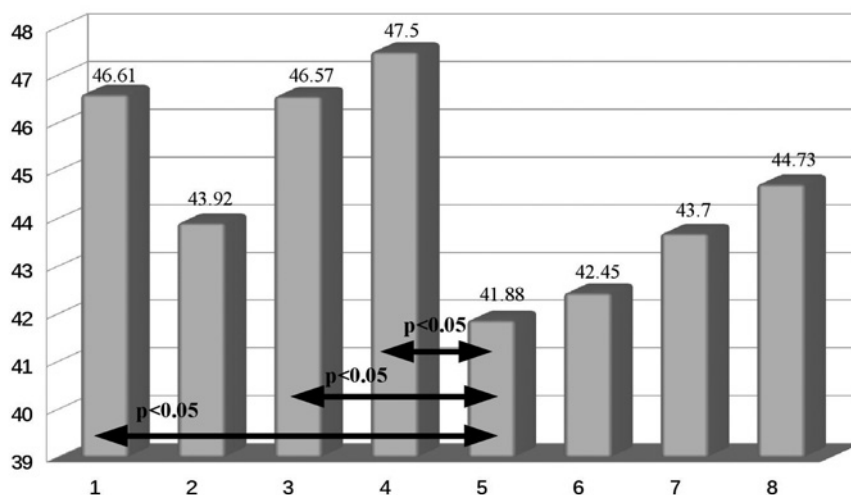
Table 3. Pearson's *r* correlation between variables concerning power and age

Variables	Teachers group (n = 198)		Control group (n = 156)	
	r	p	r	p
Directiveness	0.016	0.824	-0.163	0.042
Sense of power in the family	-0.011	0.882	-0.169	0.035
Sense of power towards students	0.02	0.779	-	-
Sense of power towards colleagues	0.011	0.882	-0.073	0.363
Sense of power towards supervisor	0.111	0.120	-0.005	0.949
Sense of ability to wield power and influence	-0.001	0.988	-0.096	0.234

Variables	Teachers group (n = 198)		Control group (n = 156)	
	r	p	r	p
Need for power	-0.168	0.018	-0.240	0.003
Need for influence	-0.156	0.028	-0.244	0.002
Resistance to subordination	-0.091	0.201	-0.079	0.326

The stage of education at which the teachers had been working proved to be a differing factor in the areas of sense of power in relations with students. The teachers working in primary schools, grades 1–3 (1st stage of education) expressed a significantly lower sense of power in relations with pupils ($p < 0.05$ in the NIR post-hoc test; $F(7.182)$; $p < 0.05$) than the teachers working only in the lower secondary schools (3rd stage of education). The results are shown in Figure 1. No statistically significant differences were observed in the areas of directiveness and need for power and influence.

Figure 1. Type of school and teachers' sense of power towards students.



The numerical symbols correspond to the following: 1-Primary Schools, grades 1–3; 2-Primary Schools, grades 4–6; 3-Primary Schools; 4-Primary and Lower Secondary Schools; 5-Lower Secondary Schools; 6-Lower Secondary and Secondary Schools; 7-Secondary Schools; 8-Higher Education Institutions.

Discussion

The teachers had significantly higher results in the areas of directiveness, sense of power in the family, sense of power towards colleagues, sense of power towards the supervisor, need for power, and resistance to subordination. Such results may be both a cause and a consequence of working as a teacher. Firstly, power changes people on the cognitive, behavioral, and social levels (cf., Fiske, 1993; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magge, 2003; Wojciszke & Strużyńska-Kujałowicz, 2007; Galinsky et al., 2006, 2008). Due to the specifics of their work, teachers are granted power over their students. Secondly, those who gain power in social life are characterized by, among other things, higher stereotypical masculinity (Lord, de Vader, & Aliger, 1986) and domination (Judge et al., 2002; Judge, Colbert, & Ilies, 2004), which is directly linked to the need for power and directiveness. Individuals expressing the above characteristics are more likely to choose the teaching profession.

The research by Peter Donhauser, Andreas Rösch and Oliver Schultheiss (2015), studying the relationship between the latent need for power and the ability to recognize emotions, showed that people with a higher need for power were better able to recognize emotions based on facial expressions. These findings suggest that one of the ways in which people with a high need for power gain a high social position may be their increased sensitivity to emotional cues in their social environment. In the future, it might be interesting to see the results of similar analyses conducted among people working as teachers in the context of professional successes such as students' achievements, students' marks, etc.

The teachers in the study had significantly lower results in the area of need for influence. This result is ambiguous. It could be assumed that teachers as a professional group, due to the specific nature of their work, would have a stronger need for influence. Such a result may be partially explained by professional burnout, especially in the context of the negative correlation between the need for influence and age and work experience.

Correlations between the variables concerning power and age differed between the teachers group and the control group. Negative correlations between age and directiveness, sense of power in the family, need for power and need for influence were observed in the control group. Among the teachers, the only negative correlation was observed in the areas of need for power and need for influence. Therefore, it can be said that directiveness and sense of power in the family drop with age, but not in the teachers group. The specific nature of their work is likely to create situations in which individuals feel as if they wielded more power. Directiveness

also does not decrease with age among the teachers. It might be interesting to conduct an analysis of directiveness levels among people just starting in the teaching profession and subsequent studies over the years. Such research would provide answers to the question whether the teaching profession attracts people with a higher level of directiveness or if working as a teacher in itself leads to an increase in the level of directiveness.

The results of this study indicate that the teachers with a shorter work experience had a stronger need for power and need for influence. The decline in the intensity of need for power and need for influence over the years of working as a teacher may be connected to professional burnout, among other factors. It is a state characterized by three components: emotional exhaustion, reduced personal involvement, and depersonalization/cynicism (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Professional burnout is one of the major issues among teachers (cf. Friedman, 2000; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006).

It has also been concluded that the teachers working in primary schools, grades 1–3 (1st stage of education) had a statistically significantly higher sense of power in relationships with students than the teachers working only in lower secondary schools (3rd stage of education). In turn, the teachers working in lower secondary schools had the lowest sense of power towards students in comparison with other subgroups. It is worth recalling the definition of the sense of power as it is understood here. It is a perception of one's own ability to influence others, e.g., the sense that one's opinion matters to them. Such results were probably influenced by the specific nature of working in lower secondary schools, which is sometimes referred to as "the most difficult stage of education". That opinion is confirmed by numerous scientific, press, and television reports (Poraj, 2009). Undoubtedly, such a state of affairs is influenced by many factors. First of all, it can be assumed that the educational problems on a similar scale also occurred before the creation of lower secondary schools, but they were less noticeable due to the uniformity of eight-grade primary schools. Secondly, the educational difficulties in this age group also stem from the specific nature of the period of adolescence, in which numerous changes take place in every area of young people's lives. Thirdly, the contemporary lifestyle linked to the change of the socio-cultural context in which teenagers are raised may be a kind of catalyst for school and educational difficulties. In addition, the specific nature of lower secondary schools, which are a relatively new phenomenon in the system of education, may also be one of the influence factors (Appelt, 2007).

Conclusions

The teachers had significantly higher results in terms of directiveness, sense of power in the family, sense of power towards colleagues, sense of power towards the supervisor, need for power and resistance to submission. They had, however, significantly lower results in the area of need for influence. The greater the teacher's work experience, the lower the need for power and influence. The teachers working in primary schools had a significantly higher sense of power towards students than the teachers working in lower secondary schools. The issue of the sense of and need for power among teachers should be explored further, particularly in the context of their professional achievements and their relationships with students. The practical implications of such results might lead to a consideration of additional courses and training for young teachers.

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